

U.S. Arms Salesman

Henry John Kuss Jr.

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WASHINGTON, July 18—The way Henry John Kuss Jr. of the Defense Department tells it, he has become the greatest arms salesman in history simply by processing the order forms.

Mr. Kuss is the official United States Government arms salesman, but he contends that he does not actually do any selling. He just provides the arms, he says, when foreign governments request them and when the Administration decides the sale is in the national interest. "We literally don't have to do a thing," he said in a recent interview in his Pentagon office. "We haven't had to go out and promote a sale since we started. We just make it known that it's possible to buy."

The requests have evidently been large. Since 1961 Mr. Kuss has filled orders for \$12.6-billion worth of weapons.

Mr. Kuss is deft in avoiding discussion of the details of his job. When he was asked at a Congressional hearing last year to explain what his complicated title meant (he is the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Logistics Negotiations), he sought unsuccessfully to give an off-the-record answer and then gave a lengthy description in which the word "sales" did not occur once.

'The Other Guy's Product'

"I don't go about cutting the other guy's product out," he said in the interview. "I've never compared the other guy's product with ours. If a country says to us they can buy an item cheaper in another part of the world, then we say, 'Go ahead and buy it.'"

"We just tell them they'd better make sure it's really cheaper," he declared.

Others who have had opportunity to watch Henry Kuss at work, however, tell a different story. They say he is a brilliant and aggressive salesman, thoroughly familiar with production curves, research and development costs, credit problems and the other intricacies of the international traffic in arms.

Two years ago Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara awarded him the Meritorious Civilian Service Medal for his "unparalleled ability as a negotiator."

Mr. Kuss is a large man, more than six feet tall and in excess of 200 pounds, with a wide, round face, a prominent double chin and graying hair. He speaks rapidly but softly, and dresses in blue and gray suits.

He was born in Astoria, Queens, on Nov. 10, 1922. He studied political science and mathematics at St. John's College in Brooklyn and served as a Navy supply officer during the last two years of World War II.

He gained the knowledge that led to his present job through many years of work as a civilian weapons technician for the Navy and in the course of making a series of studies during the nineteen-fifties of the long-range



Sales record—\$12.6-billion since 1961.

military requirements of North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries.

While Mr. Kuss's work is beginning to bring him some of the unfavorable publicity traditionally associated with the arms trade, it provides none of the riches that the great arms merchants have cumulated in the past, when the business was almost entirely a private one.

"I have to spend some of my own salary to hold the job," Mr. Kuss said, "because of all the traveling I do." He said his expenses usually amounted to more than Government travel allowance provided.

His office is sparsely furnished with a desk, a conference table, chairs, the usual Pentagon charts and a few mementos of his work.

In a glass case is a gold-hilted dagger from the defense minister of Saudi Arabia, when Mr. Kuss was responsible for the sale of \$120-million worth of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles last year. On a side table is a gilded jeweler's balance scale symbolizing Mr. Kuss's efforts to reverse the gold drain with the dollars his arms sales bring to the United States Treasury.

Mr. Kuss, his wife, the former Johanna M. Derouet of New York, and their two daughters live in Springfield, Va., one of a number of suburban communities near the Pentagon.

Disturbed by Jokes

Mr. Kuss acknowledges that the publicity about his work is beginning to disturb him. In the past, he said, he did not mind hearing the usual macabre jokes about his trade, but now "they don't sound so much like jokes any more," he declared.

The criticism seems to disturb him particularly, because, for all his bland exterior, he is a resolute cold warrior who appears to believe sincerely that his work helps to prevent the spread of communism.

In his speeches he repeatedly stresses the need to defend the "free world" against the "Communist threat" by shopping arms to Washington's allies. The fact that some of these allies occasionally use American arms to fight one another does not seem to shake his belief in his job.